

QUINCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

AD HOC SUBCOMMITTEE on MUSIC PROGRAMS MEETING

An Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Music Programs meeting was held on Monday, March 10, 2014 at 5:00 pm in the 2nd Floor Conference Room at the NAGE Building. Present were Mr. Noel DiBona, Ms. Barbara Isola, Mr. Dave McCarthy, and Mrs. Kathryn Hubley, Chair. Also attending were Superintendent Richard DeCristofaro, Deputy Superintendent Kevin Mulvey, Mr. Michael DeMarco, Ms. Beth Hallett, Mr. Richard Kenneally, Mr. Joseph Salvucci, Mrs. Caitlyn Schmidt; Quincy Band Booster representatives Ms. Lori Hagborg and Ms. Renee Czajkowski; Ms. Paula Reynolds, Citywide Parent Council Co-President; and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

Dr. DeCristofaro opened the meeting by noting that this is the first of planned program review meetings, today's focus is Instrumental Music. Ms. Hallett introduced the Instrumental Music program staff; Mr. DeMarco began by reviewing the importance of music instruction in education and thanked the School Committee and Superintendent for the program growth over the last seven years. When he first began in QPS, two teachers covered all eleven elementary schools and all band students were seen together. In later years, instruction by instrument was added and teacher schedules were reorganized so that teachers work with elementary schools and the middle school they feed into whenever possible. In recent years, elementary students have been further separated into beginning and continuing students within each instrument. Full band rehearsals are limited to the time approaching the winter and spring concerts.

Mrs. Schmidt presented a review of extracurricular initiatives, including the All-City Band, which has grown to 170 students. Students from all elementary and middle schools participate, reading and performing music that is different from what they are learning at schools. An elementary and middle school percussion ensemble is new this year.

Mr. DeMarco said that the middle school program is also organized by instrument section; instruction takes place during the school day and students miss an academic class each week on a rotating schedule. Full band rehearsal happens either before school or during the day, depending on the middle school. The extracurricular middle school Concert Band provides leadership opportunities for students as does the Honor Band. Mr. DeMarco said that these small after-school programs are integral to the development of a strong high school program. Mr. Salvucci spoke about the Jazz Band that meets on early release days. The band has grown from 8 to 19 students, enough for standard big band arrangements.

Mr. Kenneally, teacher at both high schools, shared an overview of the high school program. In high school, band classes are a graded elective; 60+ students are in the combined high school band. The band performs at school events, concerts, football games, and community activities; the band also marches in parades and those students receive Community Service hours.

Mrs. Hubley opened the discussion up for questions. Ms. Isola mentioned the Renaissance program that was at North Quincy High School. Mr. Kenneally said that students took classes in all areas of the arts; the structure allowed for small ensembles and music theory study.

Mr. McCarthy said that the instrumental music program growth is a testament to these fine teachers and he is glad to hear about the growing numbers at the elementary level. He asked for clarification on the Concert Band and Honor Band. Mr. DeMarco clarified that Concert Band and Honor Band are extracurricular activities, there is a fee and no transportation is provided.

Mr. McCarthy asked if we are doing everything we can do to keep students involved as they transition from middle to high school. Ms. Hallett said that last year, Grade 8 Instrumental Music students were automatically assigned Instrumental Music as an elective in the high school course selection process. Mr. Kenneally is working with Guidance to ensure that any student who wants to take Instrumental Music can fit it into their schedule. He is anticipating further growth as this year's Grade 8 students move up to high school.

Mr. DiBona noted that middle school athletics programs successfully feed into the high school programs, need to extend the model. Mr. Kenneally said flyup days are an opportunity for him to reach out to middle school students; he also attends practices. Mr. Kenneally noted that the younger students are more advanced than in previous years. Mr. Kenneally also said that 3-5 students every year plan to major in music in college and there are scholarship opportunities for certain specialties. Mr. DiBona asked about students coming back to volunteer; we have former students who volunteer at all levels.

Mr. DiBona asked about other cities and towns that have a higher rate of participation. Mr. DeMarco said a strong instrumental music program doesn't happen overnight; elementary students have to sustain their interest through middle school. Mr. DiBona asked about the high school marching band. Mr. Kenneally said Boston Crusaders are looking to move to Quincy and they would be a good resource. Mr. Salvucci said some upcoming students have a strong interest in percussion. Mrs. Schmidt reminded the School Committee that we have a pep band and not a marching band; none of the staff are marching band instructors.

Mrs. Hubley asked about the All-City Band rotation; Mrs. Schmidt said that Grade 5 students and any middle school students practice on the middle school release Tuesdays and Grade 4 meets on the alternate Tuesdays. Mrs. Hubley asked whether Community Service hours are awarded for students who volunteer to mentor; this could be a future consideration.

Ms. Isola said that the transition from middle school to high school is complicated and would rather have a small group of committed students than a higher number of students who were struggling. Mr. Salvucci noted there are many opportunities for other electives in high school. Mr. DeMarco said that in middle school, academic pressure is a factor. Ms. Isola requested surveying students to find out why students move away from instrumental music.

Ms. Hagborg and Ms. Czajkowski spoke on behalf of the Quincy Band Boosters, a parent group formed to support the instrumental music program through fundraising and advocacy. QBB began in September and they spent time developing mission statement and acquiring 501c3 status. They are hoping to support the growing band program with practical aspects, such as transportation through organizing carpools. Ms. Hagborg expressed frustration with the middle school program and students having to miss class time. Ms. O'Connor suggested scheduled and graded middle school classes; at high school, students should be able to take both chorus and band; string instruction should be added at all levels; and a collaboration with Eastern Nazarene College and the Quincy Symphony Orchestra on resources. Ms. Czajkowski agreed about surveying students. The QBB are hoping to support parents and would like to continue to see the instrumental music program continue to grow. The QBB are looking for outside sources and grants to assist with funding.

Dr. DeCristofaro introduced student Alex Cox, who spoke of benefitting from the many positive changes in the instrumental band program. He has participated in the All-City and Honors Bands, noting that he is fortunate to work with these great instrumental band instructors.

Dr. DeCristofaro said that scheduling issues would be reviewed across all middle schools and that the Instrumental Music teachers will continue to work with Guidance on 8-9 transition issues. He is grateful for the efforts of the staff and the continuing success of the program.

Mr. DiBona suggested that School Committee could strategize with the Quincy Band Boosters on ways enhance the program without impacting the Quincy Public Schools Budget.

Mr. McCarthy made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. DiBona and on a voice vote, the ayes have it.